

## WITNESS STATEMENT

**US House of Representatives Veterans' Affairs Committee Field Hearing "Partnering, Payment, and Provider Access: VA Community Care in North Carolina.", March 23, 2018, Fayetteville, North Carolina**

**By**

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Mr Chairman, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Members present, Congressman Richard Hudson, other Invitees and Guests. I am humbled that you have invited me to this field hearing today and welcome you all to the great city of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Our city motto is History, Heroes, and a Hometown Feeling and that can be seen anywhere you travel in Fayetteville. I am proud to call Fayetteville my home for the past 30 years. Fayetteville is the home of Fort Bragg where duty, sacrifice and love of our great country is on display 365 days a year.

Before I offer my testimony, I want to make clear to the Committee and all in attendance that any issue(s) I currently have with the Fayetteville VA Medical Center (FVAMC) are administrative in nature. I have been receiving 100% of my medical care thru the FVAMC since 1994 (24 years) and am 100% satisfied with the EXCELLENT level of care provided to me. I often tell people not to believe all the negative press they hear about the VA in general. Why? If my experiences with the FVAMC are any indication of what the VA offers, I am hard pressed to believe every negative story in the media today. Is the VA system perfect? No. Show me any large scale medical system in the world that is!

In that vein, I would like to offer my personal thanks and recognize my Primary Care Provider Dr Abul K. Azad, MD and his Staff Nurses Lillian Figueroa and Tracy Ford for all they have done for me. Time constraints do not allow me to also thank countless FVAMC Staff Members who have also offered me quality care and compassion. I am thankful for what they do for this Veteran!!

The past four years have been medically challenging for me. Three major surgeries, two minor surgical procedures, numerous hospitalizations and countless ER/Urgent Care visits. This includes experiences with the FVAMC, Veterans' Choice and Non-VA Care.

I was asked to speak to with the Committee regarding a specific issue that, as of today, has not been 100% resolved.

I have encountered an issue with the VA that I have been unable to resolve on my own after repeated attempts to do so. **Non-payment of Non-VA medical expenses that have been approved by the VA for payment.** I offer my testimony regarding this issue as I imagine I can not be the only Veteran this has happened to.

On July 22, 2016 (Friday), I sought ER care at a Non-VA Facility for issues related to a recent thoracic/chest surgery. I followed the appropriate procedure(s) and notified the FVAMC of same the following Monday (July 25, 2017). After several inquiries, I finally received a letter from the FVAMC, dated January 13, 2017, stating this episode of care has been verified, claim approved by "Salem" and pending payment.

I learned recently that the VA has finally began making payments to the ER providers now 24 months post dates of service. It remains unknown to me if the VA has communicated with the providers to advise of payment delays or specific reasons for payment delays. I have previously made repeated inquiries to the Fayetteville Non-VA Care Office and the Fayetteville VA Director's Office without success.

I contacted the VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and received a response stating they do not investigate these matters. The OIG urged me to contact the VA Compliance and Business Integrity Office (CBI) regarding this matter and provided a name and e-mail address for contact. I sent an e-mail to the named CBI official seeking assistance. I have not received an acknowledgement or response to date.

I contacted my Congressional Representative Mr. Hudson on November 6, 2017 for assistance. Mr. Hudson's Deputy District Direct, Georgia Lozier, has been very helpful in seeking a resolution on my behalf.

I have also been in contact with our local ABC television affiliate ABC 11 WTVD, in Raleigh. Their Trouble Shooter has been in contact with the VA on my behalf and is preparing a televised report about their efforts to assist.

I have extensive documentation/names/dates to support my claimed inquiries.

The ER providers have been contacting me with threats of lawsuit(s) or collections. I have provided each ER provider with a copy of the VA payment letter mentioned above. One provider has now attached a negative balance due to my credit report with Equian. This has resulted in my rejection for a home equity loan that was submitted to my mortgage company in November 2017. Additionally, my credit score has dropped from 820 to 670 as a result of non-payment by the VA.

The EMS provider turned my account over to collections and posted a negative balance due to my credit report with Equian. This has resulted in significant damage to my ability to gain credit for home improvements, new household furniture and co-signing for my son on his recent new vehicle purchase. My 25 year old son's credit score is 780. How does my 25 year old son achieve a greater score than me?? I have preached to him over the years regarding the importance of financial responsibility as a good credit standing "makes the world go around".

The EMS provider, Brunswick County EMS. is now attaching a garnishment to any tax refund I may receive from the State of North Carolina? I am attaching a copy of their letter to me dated 11/30/17 for your review.

I contacted each provider in January 2018 for status:

Brunswick County EMS – Called provider and offered my private health insurance, United Healthcare (UHC), information for payment. Same was declined as provider will not bill insurance for services > 1 year old. I submitted a manual claim to UHC for consideration and pending. UHC will likely not cover as claim filed > 1 year post date of service 7/22/16.

Novant Health (ER) – Called and spoke to Financial Services Representative. Novant has written off my entire bill as uncollectable and the current balance due is \$0.

Carolina Health Specialists (ER MD) – Called and spoke to Representative, provided my private health insurance information. Provider will file claim with UHC.

Delaney Radiologists PA (ER Radiology) – Called and spoke to representative, I paid \$46 balance due out of pocket.

On February 15, 2018, I received an update from Ms. Lozier and was advised that an un-named VA Representative providing her the following statement:

*"Good morning Ms. Lozier, Our apologies for the delay in processing this claim. Our payment center had previously suspended the claim for Pending VA/Office General Counsel Millennium Health Care Act decision (Emergent care for a non-service connected condition) because the Veteran had other insurance and after*

*clinical review it was deemed that it was unrelated to his service connected condition. The letter dated 1/23/17 was subsequently sent to the Veteran from the Fayetteville VAMC, our payment center office was not aware of the letter, nor was aware that the VAMC had authorized the emergent care as a result of complications to previous authorized surgery. However, the VAMC did not enter the authorization into their system until 2/7/18.*

*The following claims, UB #600609 and HCFAs 2296422, 2306945, 3539367 for providers Novant Health, Delaney Radiologist, and Strand Physician Specialists were processed immediately after authorization entry and were sent to payment on 2/9/18. The claims associated to the hospital are in batches pending release for payment. The ambulance claim will be processed by the VAMC Beneficiary Travel Office since the transport is authorized.*

*We have reached out to the VAMC to share this example with them and we will make every effort to improve communication between the VAMC Fayetteville and our payment center office so this issue does not happen again.*

*Again, we apologize for the delay in processing payment and the inconvenience caused to Mr. Goodwin. Please let us know if additional information is needed”.*

On March 3, 2018, I received written notification from the FVAMC that the ER, ER MD and ER Radiology services have been paid and in what amounts. There was no mention in the letter that the EMS provider has been paid and what, if any action(s), the FVAMC would take to assist me with removing the negative post to my credit report.

On March 15, 2018, I e-mailed a local FVAMC Non-VA Care Supervisor about the pending payment to the EMS Provider and a conversation that I just had with member of the FVAMC Beneficiary Travel Office. I have redacted names and phone numbers due to privacy issues.

*“Paragraph 2 from the February 15, 2018 update states the EMS bill to be paid by VAMC Beneficiary Travel Office. Correspondence I have received, from other sources regarding the EMS bill, indicated a person named “X” was the point of contact. So, I just called the FVAMC and asked to speak to “X” in the VAMC Beneficiary Travel Office. I then spoke to “X”. He stated payment for EMS transport was “sent to Texas” and became somewhat frustrated when I asked for clarification. He could not or would not say if payment has been made or when?*

*I asked for his Supervisor’s contact information, called “Supervisor Y” and left a message for callback regarding payment of the EMS bill from 7/22/2016 and assistance with removing the negative entry from my credit report.*

The FVAMC Non-VA Care Supervisor called me later in the afternoon and advised the authorization for payment of the EMS bill was approved and payment would be forthcoming from a VA Payment Center in Texas. She could not definitively say when payment would be made or what action the FVAMC would take to assist me with the removing the negative credit report posting.

I have yet to receive a response from “Supervisor Y”.

As of today, and a full 24 months after my ER visit on 7/22/16, I remain hopeful that the EMS payment in question will be paid and the FVAMC will offer its full assistance in repairing the damage to my credit report. I will happily provide the Committee with any documents they require.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, the Committee and Mr. Hudson for all you do to support our nation’s great Veterans.